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ABSTRACT

The predoctoral internship in professional psychology is a culminating training experience conducted at the end of one's doctoral education. One might say that the internship is to practice what the dissertation is to research. The doctoral graduate education and training program, through didactic and experiential training in the science and practice of psychology, affords the student an opportunity to learn the basic competencies necessary to provide psychological services. The internship building on the professional competencies acquired in the student's graduate program, provides significant opportunities for the intern to assume substantial responsibility for carrying out major professional functions under appropriate supervision in a service setting. An internship in professional psychology occurs prior to the awarding of the doctoral degree and is to be completed over a one year period, at full-time training, or over two successive years, at half-time training. Accreditation and principles, accreditation guidelines, administrative setting, and the present status of school-based internships are examined. A school district could develop an internship program in professional psychology as a separate, independent, institutional entity or as one among two or more institutional entities in the form of a consortium program. (JBJ)

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Overview

The predoctoral internship in professional psychology is a culminating training experience conducted at the end of one's doctoral education. One might say that the internship is to practice what the dissertation is to research. This is not to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive. Rather, they reflect both conceptually and administratively the fulfillment of different aspects of doctoral education and training goals in professional psychology.

"Professional psychology" is defined broadly in this instance as any area in psychology in which an individual with appropriate education and training provides psychological services to the general public. The doctoral graduate education and training program, through didactic and experiential training in the science and practice of psychology, affords the student an opportunity to learn the basic competencies necessary to provide psychological services.

The internship, building on the professional competencies acquired in the student's graduate program, provides significant opportunities for the student (intern) to assume substantial responsibility for carrying out major professional functions under appropriate supervision in a service setting Aninternship in professional psychology occurs prior to the awarding of the doctoral degree and is to be completed over a one-year period, at full-time training, or over two successive years, at half-time training (APA Committee on Accreditation, 1995).

Accreditation and Principles

Since internships are a part of the education and training expected of students in an area of professional psychology, accreditation principles which govern the academic portion of such training also govern the internship. They are, briefly stated, as follows:

1. Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental process of self-study and external review intended to evaluate, enhance, and publicly recognize quality in institutions and programs of higher education and training.
2. Doctoral education and training for entry-level practice in professional psychology should be broad, not narrow and technical, and should be guided by a program philosophy or model that relates the science and practice of psychology.
3. The accreditation process places major emphasis on the outcomes of education and training, relative to program goals, objectives, and training model. Accreditation assures the clarity, appropriateness, and sustainability of these outcomes.
4. The integrity of accreditation rests on there being fair and reasonable guidelines and procedures of operation, an appropriate balance between confidentiality and public disclosure, and the exercise of professional judgment.

Accreditation Guidelines

A. As a prerequisite for accreditation, the program's purpose must be within the scope of the accrediting body and must be pursued in an institutional setting that is appropriate for training professional psychologists.

B. The program clearly states its goals, objectives, and philosophy of training, the practice competencies expected of its graduates, and the organized training plan by which those outcomes are to be achieved.

C. The program has resources of appropriate quality and sufficiency to achieve its training goals and objectives. Among those resources are the internship staff, interns, facilities, administrative, and financial support.

D. The program recognizes the importance of cultural and individual diversity in the training of psychologists, reflecting the same in staff and intern recruitment efforts and in didactic and experiential training.

E. The program demonstrates that its policies, procedures, and training operations are characterized by mutual respect and courtesy between interns and staff, that staff are accessible to interns, and that due process is observed.

F. The program demonstrates a commitment to excellence through self-study, which assures that its goals and objectives are met, it enhances the quality of training, and it contributes to fulfillment of its sponsor's mission.

G. The program demonstrates its commitment to public disclosure and "truth in advertising" by providing written and other communications that appropriately represent it to the public, including applicants.

H. The program demonstrates its commitment to the accreditation process by fulfilling its responsibilities to the accrediting body from which its accredited status is granted. It remains in "good standing."

Administrative Setting

An internship program may consist of, or be located under, a single administrative institutional entity (e.g., hospital, community health center, school district, counseling center, prison, etc.) or it may take the form of a consortium (i.e., being comprised of multiple independently administered entities whichhave in writing formally agreed to pool resources to conduct a training program in professional psychology). Written consortial agreements should articulate the following:

(a) characteristics of participating entities;

(b) rationale for the consortial partnership;

(c) each entity's commitment to the program's goal, etc.;

(d) each entity's obligations in function and resources;

(e) each entity's adherence to central coordination of plans;

(f) each entity's commitment to uniform administration.

School-Based Internships: Present Status

At the present time, only three school districts have separately-accredited internship programs in professional psychology, all being within the state of Texas and all having applied and been granted accredited status within the past five years. They are the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (Houston), the Dallas Independent School District, and the Houston Independent School District (APA Committee on Accreditation, 1994 and 1995a).

Numerous other separately-accredited internship programs in professional psychology (among the slightly more than 400 accredited internship programs) serve as excellent training settings for school psychology and professional psychology (e.g., children's hospitals, youth centers, and family servicescenters), if the intern's doctoral preparation is appropriate for the training available in such settings. Information about these programs, and others not accredited, can be found in the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) *Directory* 1994-1995 (Krieshok and Cantrell, 1994).

Finally, there are a few accredited consortium internship programs in professional psychology that include among the consortium entities elements of school districts. One of the larger among those is the Nebraska Consortium, operated and administered by the University of Nebraska. School districts in Lincoln and Omaha are among the many regional health and human service agencies participating in this consortium which presently trains 19 full-time interns in professional psychology.

In addition to the APPIC directory previously cited, an excellent resource for those with particular interest in internship training for school psychologists is the *Directory of Internships for Doctoral Students in School Psychology*, prepared by the Joint Committee on Internships for the Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs (CDSPP), APA Division of School Psychology (APADSP), and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (1995). In addition to listing internship training settings that meet the criteria for being listed (not to be confused with "accredited") by the organizations represented through the Joint Committee on Internships in School Psychology, that publication contains helpful guidelines, which wereestablished by leaders in the field of school psychology, for setting up such programs. Their guidelines are complementary to those established for accreditation by the APA Committee on Accreditation.

Summary

A school district could develop an internship program in professional psychology as a separate, independent, institutional entity or as one among two or more institutional entities in the form of a consortium program. In either case, its accreditation would be a function of its quality as judged relative to the "Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology" (APA Committee on Accreditation, 1995b), the document from which much of this executive summary is developed.

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